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University of Georgia Researchers Bring Cutting-Edge Peanut Processing Technology to Africa

Georgia is the number one U.S. producer of peanuts, providing more than 45 percent of peanuts grown annually in the United States. So it's not surprising that the University of Georgia leads the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Collaborative Research on Peanut and Mycotoxin, which aims to strengthen the peanut value chain and increase peanut farmers' incomes.

One major contribution this Lab has made to the peanut industry is a groundbreaking dry blanching technology that helps producers detect and sort aflatoxin-contaminated peanuts after light roasting. Aflatoxins are naturally occurring fungi that produce carcinogenic toxins in some foods. They can cause severe health issues, especially in developing countries where aflatoxin levels may not be well-regulated.

Originally implemented in the Philippines, the dry blanching technique opened up international export opportunities for Philippine processors to markets with strict aflatoxin standards. In 2012, three Feed the Future Innovation Lab researchers from the University of Georgia brought this dry blanching technology to Ghana and Uganda through workshops co-sponsored by the International Union of Food Science and Technology. In these workshops, Drs. Manjeet Chinnan, Wojciech Florkowski and Anna Resurreccion facilitated hands-on training for government officials, private sector representatives, and members of academic institutions, laying the foundation for the blanching technique to be scaled up and commercialized.

The results of this technology dissemination to date have been impressive. In Ghana, private food processing company CBA Foods launched a chocolate peanut spread at the Ghana International Fair after adopting the new blanching technique. Demand for the spread has so exceeded supply that CBA Foods has since invested in a large capacity grinding mill to keep up with sales. Similarly, in Uganda, a new nutritious peanut cookie developed by Hometech Foods is selling about 1,000 packages of cookies and generating $400 per week thanks to the company's newfound ability to screen for aflatoxin contamination.

For her contribution to the development of aflatoxin-free peanut products, Dr. Resurreccion was named a recipient of the Institute of Food Technologists' **2013 W.K. Kellogg International Food Security Award and Lectureship**.

The new dry blanching technology has enormous potential to enable even the smallest peanut processors to reduce aflatoxin contamination in processed peanut products to levels consistent with international contaminant standards, representing great opportunities for the peanut value chain in Feed the Future countries as well as offering new solutions for contamination to U.S. producers. According to the Peanut and Mycotoxin Innovation Lab, the U.S. peanut industry benefits by at least ten dollars for every dollar invested in peanut research under Feed the Future.